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ABSTRACT

Addressing the trend in American colleges and universities to award constantly higher grades each year, New College of Hofstra University has been studying the grading patterns over the past years. Grades awarded during the academic year 1975-76 have not changed significantly. They remained at B level. The percent of grades in each grade category is also fairly constant, with one noticeable trend toward more DE (deferred evaluation) and H (hold) grades. Fewer grades were awarded, reflecting the general decrease in enrollment at New College. (Author/KE)

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Analysis of Grades Awarded at New College: 1975 - 76

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Introduction

There has been a continuing trend at American colleges and universities to award constantly higher grades each year. New College of Hofstra University has been concerned about this problem and for this reason it has been studying the grading patterns over the past four years. The purpose of this report is to present an analysis of the grades awarded during the academic year 1975 - 76.

The New College grading system is designed to permit the student flexibility in selecting the form by which he/she wishes to be evaluated, and at the same time permits him opportunities to delay final evaluation. For the purposes of this report, the grading system will be discussed in terms of traditional grades (A, B, C, D, and F) and nontraditional (P, F, DE, H, NE).

At New College, the traditional grades have the same meaning as at most colleges and universities:

A	Superior mastery of course content
B	Good
C	Satisfactory
D	Minimally Adequate
F	Unsatisfactory

The nontraditional grades have the following meaning at New College:

P	Pass, satisfactory or better mastery of course content
F	Fail, less than satisfactory mastery of course content
DE	Deferred Evaluation, evaluation is deferred for a period of time agreed to by, and in contact with, the course instructor
H	Hold, evaluation is extended, at the instructor's discretion, to a date no later than the fourth week of the following New College session
NE	No Evaluation, student has elected after the first half of the course to have no evaluation of his/her mastery of course content

There is no limit placed on the number of courses a student elects to have evaluated in terms of these nontraditional grades; however, there is some limit placed on the number of DE, H and NE grades the student can accumulate. This limit is a function of the number of semester hours attempted versus the number of semester hours completed by the student.

Procedures

Data for this report were compiled from grade summary sheets submitted to the New College registrar's recorder at the conclusion of each course. Total number of grades were tallied and percentages computed.

Results

Faculty Offered Courses

Table 1 below contains the breakdown of grades awarded at New College over the last three years. Grades are presented as either traditional or nontraditional as defined above for each Area (Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Interdisciplinary Studies) and the college as a whole.

TABLE 1

Number and Percent of Traditional and Nontraditional Grades Awarded by Each Area and New College Over the Last Three Years

1973 - 1974[1]

AREA	Traditional (A, B, C, D, F)		Nontraditional (H, DE, NE, P, E)		Total
Humanities	388	(55%)	311	(45%)	699
Social Sciences	629	(68%)	295	(32%)	924
Natural Science	156	(60%)	104	(40%)	260
Interdisciplinary Studies	167	(57%)	124	(43%)	291
New College	1340	(62%)	834	(38%)	2174

1974 - 1975[2]

AREA	Traditional (A, B, C, D, F)		Nontraditional (H, DE, NE, P, E)		Total
Humanities	305	(56%)	234	(44%)	539
Social Sciences	681	(76%)	215	(24%)	896
Natural Science	130	(60%)	88	(40%)	218
Interdisciplinary Studies	110	(83%)	22	(17%)	132
New College	1226	(69%)	559	(31%)	1785

[1]1973 - 74 Data obtained from NCERO Report #4, July 1974.

[2]1974 - 75 Data obtained from NCERO Report #15, June 1975.

1975 - 1976

AREA	Traditional (A, B, C, D, F)		Nontraditional (H, DE, NE, P, F)		Total
Humanities	215	(65%)	117	(35%)	332
Social Sciences	596	(76%)	185	(24%)	781
Natural Science	105	(75%)	34	(25%)	139
Interdisciplinary Studies	92	(76%)	29	(24%)	121
New College	1008	(73%)	365	(27%)	1373

One result indicated in Table 1 is that nontraditional grades are awarded in all areas approximately one fourth of the time. This suggests that the awarding of these grades is acceptable to both faculty and students. However, Table 1 also suggests that there has been a noticeable decrease in the percentage of nontraditional grades awarded over the past three years, i.e. a total decrease of 7% from 1973 - 74 to 1974 - 75 and a total decrease of 4% from 1974 - 75 to 1975 - 76.

The next few tables contain data on the original* grades awarded in faculty offered courses at New College for the elective area programs in 1975 - 76. Table 2 is an overall summary of grades in terms of percentages of each grade. Table 3 is a breakdown for traditional grades and Table 4 for nontraditional grades. Both the number of each grade awarded and the percent of the total grades represented is provided. (Courses in the Special Studies Program are not included.)

* Original grades are defined as those grades awarded by the faculty member on the official roster at the conclusion of each course and do not take into account changes in grades made after that time.

TABLE 2

Percentage Summary of All Original Grades Awarded in Faculty Offered Courses By Area for 1975 - 76

AREA	A	B	C	D	F	P	F	NE	H-DE
Humanities	25%	24%	12%	1%	2%	8%	0	4%	27%
Social Sciences	28%	31%	13%	2%	1%	3%	0	1%	21%
Natural Science	32%	23%	16%	1%	0	8%	0	1%	19%
Interdisciplinary Studies	30%	34%	12%	0	0	4%	0	1%	19%
New College	28%	29%	10%	1%	1%	6%	0	2%	23%

TABLE 3

The Number and Percent of Nontraditional Original Grades Awarded by Each Major Area and New College for 1975 - 76

AREA	A	B	C	D	F	Total
Humanities	83 (38%)	82 (38%)	41 (19%)	5 (3%)	4 (2%)	215
Social Sciences	222 (37%)	246 (41%)	100 (17%)	19 (3%)	9 (2%)	596
Natural Science	44 (42%)	32 (30%)	22 (21%)	7 (7%)	0	105
Interdisciplinary Studies	36 (39%)	41 (45%)	15 (16%)	0	0	92
New College	385 (38%)	401 (40%)	178 (18%)	31 (3%)	13 (1%)	1008

TABLE 4

The Number and Percent of Nontraditional Original Grades Awarded by Each Major Area and New College for 1975 - 76

AREA	P	F	NE	H-DE	Total
Humanities	25 (21%)	0	4 (3%)	88 (76%)	117
Social Sciences	40 (22%)	0	6 (3%)	139 (75%)	185
Natural Science	11 (32%)	0	2 (6%)	21 (62%)	34
Interdisciplinary Studies	5 (17%)	0	2 (7%)	22 (76%)	29
New College	81 (22%)	0	14 (4%)	270 (74%)	365

In terms of traditional grades (Table 3) more A and B grades were awarded than any other grade. This was true in each of the four Areas as well as for the College as a whole. As reported in the March 28, 1976 edition of The New York Times, grade inflation - more A's and B's, fewer C's and D's - has become widespread in the academic world.

Further analysis of grading patterns across the four Areas suggests that these patterns are not statistically consistent. Depending upon the Area of study, the grades will tend to be higher or lower in one Area than in another. Specifically, by observing Table 3 one can see that the Natural Science and Interdisciplinary Studies Areas tend to award more A and B grades and conversely fewer C, D, and F grades than the Humanities and Social Sciences Areas. This relationship is shown to be statistically significant (at .01 alpha level) by the use of a Chi Square analysis. The computed Chi Square was 36.21 and the critical Chi Square for 12 degrees of freedom was 26.22. An unfortunate aspect of a Chi Square analysis is that there is no statistical followup that pinpoints the nature of the existing relationship. Therefore, only an analysis of the indicated percentages can be of use in determining

what Areas grade their students higher than other Areas.

In terms of nontraditional grades awarded (Table 4), three-fourths of all grades awarded in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Interdisciplinary Studies Areas were grades of H or DE. The Natural Science Area is not far behind with over half (62%) of the grades awarded being H or DE. The high incidence of H and DE grades, both of which are devices by which the student may delay completing the required work for a course, may suggest that the New College Calendar with its predominantly 7½ week courses may not be permitting the student sufficient time to complete assignments.

Comparison of grades awarded in faculty offered courses over last four years

Data were available from previous reports on the grade distribution of three previous years, 1972 - 73, 1973 - 74 and, 1974 - 75. A comparison of this year's distribution with these three years appears in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Percent of Grades Awarded in Years 1972 - 1976 at New College for Traditional and Nontraditional

Year	A	B	C	D	F	P	F	NE	H,DE
1972-73	27%	26%	9%	1%	1%	11%	0%	3%	27%
1973-74	26%	23%	10%	2%	1%	10%	0%	3%	25%
1974-75	27%	27%	11%	3%	1%	9%	1%	4%	19%
1975-76	28%	29%	10%	1%	1%	6%	0%	2%	23%

Except for 1973 - 74, the percent of A and B grades have shown a small but consistent increase, while the percent of P grades have shown a continuing decline. The percent of H and DE grades have increased by 4% over the academic year of 1974 - 75.

Grades Awarded in Student Initiated Projects

The phrase Student Initiated Project is used to describe a variety of learning opportunities and modalities other than the traditional classroom. Included here are grades awarded in the following types of projects: Senior Projects and Senior Theses, Individual Study, Off-Campus Education Projects, Credit by Examination and Peer Teaching. Table 6 below contains a summary of all the grades awarded in these projects.

TABLE 6

Summary of Grades Awarded in Student Initiated Projects by Area (1975 - 76)

AREA	A	B	C	D	P	NE	H,DE
Humanities	39%	10%	1%	0	26%	1%	23%
Social Sciences	31%	12%	9%	6%	25%	0	17%
Natural Science	90%	10%	0	0	0	0	0
Liberal Arts	40%	0	0	0	40%	0	20%
New College Total	39%	11%	3%	1%	25%	1%	20%

NB - The grade of F was not awarded to any student in any area.

Comparing Table 6 with Table 2, one notices a higher percentage of A and P grades in Student Initiated Projects. Perhaps these higher grades are to be expected considering the student is working on material (s)he has a keen interested in and desires to expand his/her knowledge in that area. An explanation for the higher percentage of P grades may be the result of a faculty policy initiated a few years ago which encouraged students to take projects for Pass/Fail.

Table 7 compares the percent of each grade awarded in Student Initiated Projects over the past four years. There is a noticeable increase in the percent of A and B grades and a corresponding decrease in the number of P grades. This most probably reflects a relaxation of the faculty policy cited above. In 1975-76, there is a higher percentage of H and DE grades than in previous years. Consistent with previous years practices, students completing Student Initiated Projects are most likely to receive either an A or P grade.

TABLE 7

Comparison of Percent of Grades Awarded in Student Initiated Projects Over the Last Four Years

Year	A	B	C	D	F	P	NE	H,DE
1972-73	26	9	2	0	0	41	3	20
1973-74	24	9	1	1	0	44	2	19
1974-75	35	10	2	0	0	38	1	14
1975-76	39	11	3	1	0	25	1	20

The number of Student Initiated Projects for 1975 - 76 is 130. This is approximately the same number of such projects completed the previous academic year.

Summary

In general, the accumulative grade average over the last few years at New College has not changed significantly, remaining at the A level. The percent of grades in each grade category is also fairly constant with one noticeable trend toward more DE and H grades.

On the whole, fewer grades were awarded reflecting the general decrease in enrollment at New College during the current year. However, there were approximately the same number of Student Initiated Projects this year as in the previous academic year.

References

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